

Message Text

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PAGE 01 CANBER 02082 180316Z

17

ACTION EA-09

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FM AMEMBASSY CANBERRA

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 7733

INFO AMCONSUL MELBOURNE

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C O N F I D E N T I A L CANBERRA 2082

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: AS, PINT

SUBJECT: WHITLAM SURVIVES AS ALP LEADER

REF: CANBERRA 1811

1. SUMMARY: GOUGH WHITLAM WAS RETAINED AS THE ALP'S PARLIAM-
MENTARY LEADER AFTER A STORMY MEETING OF THE PARTY'S
PARLIAMENTARY CAUCUS ON MARCH 17. THIS OUTCOME REFLECTED THE
FACT THAT THE ALP'S PARLIAMENTARY MEMBERS HAVE NOT YET DECIDED
WHO SHOULD REPLACE WHITLAM AS LEADER. THE ALP CAUCUS IS NOW
BADLY FRAGMENTED AND ITS ABILITY TO FUNCTION AS AN EFFECTIVE
OPPOSITION HAS BEEN MARKEDLY WEAKENED. END SUMMARY

2. CAUCUS CHAIRMAN, SENATOR BROWN FROM VICTORIA, RULED OUT
MOTIONS CALLING FOR WHITLAM'S RESIGNATION; BUT WHITLAM WAS
SEVERELY CRITICIZED BY SEVERAL MEMBERS FOR HIS INVOLVEMENT IN
THE IRAQUI LOANS AFFAIR. MHR KIM BEAZLEY, WHO RESIGNED HIS
SHADOW PORTFOLIO AS DEFENSE AND EDUCATION MINISTER, SENATOR
JOHN WHEELDON, SENATOR GEORGE GEORGES, MHR PAUL KEATING,
MHR DICK KLUGMAN, AND SENATOR KEN WRIEDT, THE ALP'S SENATE
LEADER WERE THE LEADING CRITICS. THESE MEN REPRESENT ALL
THE VARIOUS FACTIONS WITHIN THE ALP AND THEIR CRITICISMS
ILLUSTRATE THAT OPPOSITION TO WHITLAM NOW COMES FROM ALL SPEC-
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PAGE 02 CANBER 02082 180316Z

TRUMS OF THE PARTY.

3. IN CONTRAST WHITLAM'S STRONGEST SUPPORT CAME FROM DEPUTY LEADER TOM UREN AND THE ALP'S LEFT WING ALTHOUGH HE WAS ALSO SUPPORTED BY MODERATES LIKE MHR MICK YOUNG, SENATOR JAMES MCCLELLAND, AND MHR TED INNES. IT IS IRONIC THAT WHITLAM, WHO ASSUMED LEADERSHIP OF THE PARTY AS THE CANDIDATE OF THE MODERATE AND RIGHT-WING FACTIONS, NOW IS DEPENDENT UPON THE LEFT WING FOR HIS POLITICAL SURVIVAL.

4. FORMER TREASURER BILL HAYDEN WAS ELECTED TO THE SHADOW MINISTRY TO REPLACE KIM BEAZLEY, AN INDICATION THAT HE IS PROBABLY READY TO CONTEST THE LEADERSHIP WHEN AND IF IT BECOMES OPEN. ALSO, SENATOR JOHN WHEELDON MAY WELL RESIGN FROM THE SHADOW MINISTRY SHORTLY TO INDICATE HIS LACK OF CONFIDENCE IN WHITLAM'S LEADERSHIP.

5. COMMENT: THE FEELING NOW IS THAT WHITLAM'S DAYS AS LEADER ARE NUMBERED AND THAT HE WILL ALMOST CERTAINLY BE FORCED TO STAND DOWN WITHIN THE NEXT TWELVE MONTHS; BUT WHITLAM HAS SCRAPED THROUGH AGAIN AND HE MAY WELL DO SO IN THE FUTURE. WHAT IS CLEAR IS THAT THE LABOR PARTY IS SPLIT IN SEVERAL DIFFERENT DIRECTIONS AND SEEMS TO BE INCREASINGLY PREOCCUPIED WITH INTERNATIONAL SQUABBLES RATHER THAN WITH PERFORMING AS AN EFFECTIVE OPPOSITION PARTY. MANY ALP PARLIAMENTARIAN, MOST NOTABLY WHITLAM, MCCLELLAND, WRIEDT, BEAZLEY, AND WHEELDON ARE BECOMING STRIDENT AND ABUSIVE IN ATTACKING OPPONENTS BOTH INSIDE AND OUTSIDE THE ALP; THEY SEEM TO HAVE CONCLUDED THAT EMOTIONAL OUTBURSTS ARE AN EFFECTIVE SUBSTITUTE FOR REASONED DEBATE. MEANWHILE, THE TWO BEST CANDIDATES FOR THE FUTURE LEADERSHIP OF THE ALP, DON DUNSTAN AND BOB HAWKE, REMAIN OUTSIDE OF PARLIAMENT. IT IS BECOMING INCREASINGLY CLEAR THAT THE PARLIAMENTARY CAUCUS IS NOT INCLINED TO WELCOME THEM TO ASSUME THE LEADERSHIP IN THE IMMEDIATE FUTURE. END COMMENT.
HARGROVE

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